

themselves with the tribe. Finding the new government official in a cooperative spirit, Hamilton solicited his support for an elected tribal council. McFatridge refused to endorse an elected council, but was willing to employ a device becoming common on other reservations. He agreed to the election of a "business committee" to deal with the specific questions of tribal enrollment and the approval of leasing arrangements on the reservation. The business committee on most reservations was usually a small body of five or ten tribal members. With allotment well underway on many reservations, including the Blackfoot, a smaller business committee seemed more efficient than calling together the tribal council of 40 to 50 members or as on some reservations, the entire adult male population. Accordingly, the larger tribal council was assembled primarily for major issues, such as informing the Blackfeet of changes in government policy (FRC, 1912).

Hamilton had little difficulty getting himself elected to the business committee, thanks to his earlier efforts to identify himself as a Blackfoot spokesman. He quickly dominated the business committee and pushed it to consider all questions of interest to the Blackfeet. He used the meetings as a forum to discuss the administration of the Blackfoot cattle industry and to resurrect a long-standing Blackfoot claim for compensation for land lost in the nineteenth century. When questioned about the committee's authority to deal with such matters, he replied that it was simply providing advisory recommendations (FRC, 1910; NA, 1970).

Over the next several years, Hamilton continued to expand the business committee's agenda. He used the committee as a forum to turn the Blackfeet from a fragmented tribe, frequently at war with itself, to an issue oriented, politically minded community. He saw the business committee as a place to resolve Blackfoot differences and as a symbol to attract Blackfoot loyalty. Membership on the committee also gave him a cloak of legitimacy to pursue Blackfoot interests outside the normal channels through the Office of Indian Affairs. On six occasions between 1912 and 1919, Hamilton travelled to Washington,

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D.C., where he established contact with sympathetic Congressmen and eastern philanthropists (FRC, 1914; NA, 1917a).

Typical of his activities was his testimony before a Senate committee in 1914 alleging that 149 Blackfeet had starved on the reservation the previous winter. The charges, to say the least, were exaggerated. Many of those listed had died of natural causes unrelated to malnutrition, while over half were still alive ten years later. The allegations, however, sufficiently impressed Senator Mark Lane of Oregon, who repeated them on the Senate floor. Hamilton in later years was not above quoting his own charges from the *Congressional Record* as the authority for his claim. Nevertheless, Hamilton succeeded in drawing attention to what were undeniably deplorable conditions on the reservation. A subsequent investigation failed to sustain allegations of starvation among the Blackfeet, but it did, for unrelated reasons, lead to the removal of Superintendent McFatrige. Hamilton's initiative in prompting the investigation left the impression among the Blackfeet that he exercised real power, even to the extent of removing a superintendent. He quickly took advantage of that impression to further escalate the business committee's activities (NA, 1915c; 1922b).

A recurrent issue on the reservation involved a claim arising from land the Blackfeet lost in 1874. That year, through a Presidential order, a large section of the reservation was opened to White settlement. The Blackfeet never received payment for the land lost; at the time, however, they had given the loss little notice, since they had ceased using the area as a hunting ground. From time to time over the next several decades the Blackfeet requested that the Office of Indian Affairs press their claim in Washington, but to no avail. Hamilton made it a central theme of the business committee. The issue appealed to all elements of the tribe and furthered his own career as a tribal leader. In 1919, he gained permission to hire a Washington, D.C., law firm to obtain Congressional sanction for a suit before the U.S. Court of Claims. Five years later, Congress passed the necessary sanction enabling legislation. Finally

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after years of litigation and three years after Hamilton's death in 1932, the Court of Claims sustained the Blackfoot claim (NA, 1920a; 1936a).

Until 1919, Hamilton and the business committee devoted most of their energies toward attempting to preserve all of the Blackfoot Reservation for the benefit of the Blackfoot people. In 1907, Congress passed an allotment act for the Blackfeet. It was a common practice for Congress to pass special allotment acts taking into consideration the particular conditions of the reservation and requiring only general adherence to the General Allotment Act of 1887. Under the terms of the 1907 Act each Blackfoot tribal member enrolled before 30 June 1911 was to select an allotment of 320 acres, either all in grazing land or divided between 280 acres of grazing land and 40 acres of irrigated land. Any land remaining after allotment was to be classified and opened by Presidential proclamation to settlement under the various entry laws of the United States. On the Blackfoot Reservation nearly one-half of the land was potentially available for entry after allotment.

For various technical reasons the Office of Indian Affairs did not submit the Blackfoot allotment schedule for approval by the Secretary of the Interior until 1917. During the preceding five years, Hamilton had worked assiduously to change the nature of the allotments and to keep the "surplus" land from entry. On one occasion he completely defied his own business committee when a majority had been persuaded to support Montana Senator Thomas Walsh's bill allowing early entry on a portion of the surplus land. Hamilton had gone to Washington as part of a delegation committed to supporting the bill but testified against it instead. It was a measure of his confidence that he thought he could reverse his instructions and still retain his position on the business committee. His judgment proved accurate. The disclosure that part of the reservation might contain oil and gas soon brought the business committee around to Hamilton's position.

The possibility of mineral wealth on the reservation also suggested a means of preserving the

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